

## **Protecting Early Childhood Mental Health through Parent Coaching**

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### **A B S T R A C T**

*Early childhood mental health is a crucial aspect that affects children's future emotional, social and cognitive development. This study aims to improve parents' understanding and skills in maintaining children's mental health through mentoring and coaching activities. The research used a quasi-experiment method with analysis techniques using Friedman and Mann-Whitney non-parametric statistics. This research was conducted in Kemingking Dalam Village, Jambi. Sampling in this study were parents who have children aged 4-6 years and assistants or carers of children aged 4-6 years. The results showed that the coaching activities succeeded in increasing parents' awareness and understanding so that they are better prepared to assist their children with various emotional situations and can prevent early child mental health disorders. The findings also showed that inconsistent parenting and parents' busy schedules are factors that hinder children's mental health development. Therefore, coaching for parents is effective as a preventive measure to support children's overall growth and development.*

### **Key Word:**

*Children's Mental Health, Parent Coaching, Parenting, Early Childhood*

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## Introduction

Mental health in early childhood is important, but it is often ignored in daily life. Although early childhood seems to have a relaxed and worry-free journey. However, it is a fact that children's mental health in early childhood in their growth, development, and quality of life is strongly influenced by how stimuli are provided from the environment around the child, thus affecting the child's life in the future (Shonkoff.J.P., 2008). Children's mental health is not always associated with the state of the child's mental illness but also includes the child's ability to think clearly, control emotions, and want to get along with friends his age (Hasanah, 2017). This is what makes early childhood very important to pay attention to because, usually, children aged 0-6 years are in a golden period, so it is important to pay attention to the thoughts and emotions of each child. This period is also a time when important foundations for the child's next life are laid, such as social adjustment, thinking skills, and emotional regulation in children continue to develop rapidly (Kartikasari, Sumayni, & Susanti, 2023).

Children's mental health includes their ability to think clearly, control their emotions, and socialise with other children of their age. Children with good mental health will definitely produce positive characters, such as being able to adapt to new circumstances, being able to manage stress and self-emotions, and being able to maintain good relationships with people around. Conversely, children with poor mental health at preschool age will be able to cause behavioural disorders in children that have an effect as a result of the mismatch between mental and emotional children, as well as children who have a social life that is not appropriate for their age (Hasanah, 2017). Children who have proper mental health will also develop well so that stages of life, from childhood to adulthood, are influenced by the mental health conditions of each individual (Yuliana, 2022).

Mental health problems in children usually happen unconsciously or are unknown to parents. Children's mental health, if developed with good parenting from infants and toddlers, will be able to have a good impact, such as creating a sense of confidence in children in any situation, so that when children grow up, children will grow healthy mental behaviour as well (Kurnia & Aditya, 2023). Emotions are an

impact of the success of social relationships that children form. This causes emotions to play an important role in supporting children when adjusting to their social environment (Hurlock, 2000). In this case, to create a healthy environment, parents play an important role in developing children's mental health properly. Parenting and interaction between parents and children are most important for the development of children's mental health (Fara, et al., 2024). In addition, (Kartikasari, Sumayni, & Susanti, 2023), also added that parents have an important role in supporting the overall development and well-being of children, with the early steps that can be given by creating a safe, loving, and supportive environment for children's development. The treatment and words of parents also have an impact on children's mental development; problems that occur in the family sometimes make children become more closed to anyone. In fact, children who experience mental health problems will experience stress in the child (Saripudin, 2022). This can be called parenting stress, which arises when parents carry out their roles and responsibilities, experiencing difficulties that affect children's behaviour, well-being, and the way children are able to satisfy themselves (Prasetyo & Ifadah, 2023).

Children's mental health is influenced by 3 factors, such as 1) parenting, 2) children's interaction with parents, and 3) parents' understanding of children's mental health. This is the finding of (Salamah, Fauziah, & Wibawa, 2024). It was also found that to maintain children's mental health, parents have a role in several actions that must be taken in everyday life. The actions are 1) respect, 2) listen, 3) build children's trust, 4) create a positive environment, 5) help children solve problems, 6) set realistic goals, 7) avoid sarcastic comments, and 8) provide encouragement. In line with the findings (Utami & Thohir, 2022) that the inhibiting factors for parents in assisting children's development are parents' busyness and parents having readiness as a substitute for teachers. Parenthood education is important for every parent in order to maximise the development of all children's potential, both physical, cognitive, and psychosocial. In line with the principles of early childhood learning, learning activities will be fun if done through play, which will provide many benefits to children's development, such as sharpening children's physical and motor senses, and can also optimise children's abilities (Bustan, Nurfadilah, & Fitria, 2016).

Based on the previous findings of researchers in Kemingking Dalam Village, it was found that many children had poor mental health development. Some children were found to have difficulties in controlling their emotions; during play activities, there were children who, when another friend accidentally pushed, the child was immediately angry while saying inappropriate words and then hitting his friend. Other children, when asked to share toys, some children do not want to share and even control all the toys themselves. There are also children who are shy when spoken to and invited to play at all and do not want to just sit near their parents. After tracing it, it turns out that some of these children do have a background of poor parenting from parents. Due to busy work and parents who have a less harmonious relationship, besides that, there are also parents who have a low educational background, only up to the high school level, so that there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding of parents in assisting the growth and development of their children.

Thus, it is important for parents to receive training on healthy parenting in order to shape children into mentally healthy individuals. Increasing knowledge and skills for parents in this case can be said to be an agent of change because parents have a close relationship with children in terms of parenting with children's mental health (Suminar & Hamidah, 2021). Therefore, children's mental health needs to be developed through various holistic approaches that include preventive efforts, mental health education, and providing facilities to create quality health. Families, schools, and communities have an important role to play in creating environments that favourably influence children's mental health (Ruth. & Guk-Guk, 2024).

Based on the problem above, it shows the importance of preparing generations starting from pre-school age as an age group that is still very sensitive to various stimuli from the environment around the child. So parents and adults who always interact with children and act as supporters in optimising the development of pre-school-age children to be mentally healthy need to be given new skills and insights for parents regarding early childhood assistance and parenting. This is the basis for choosing the research topic: that through coaching for parents of early childhood, it is expected to increase understanding and the right way of mentoring for parents in optimising children's mental health development. In addition, previous researchers

(Kusnadi & Agustin, 2019) proved that coaching activities provided to parents were effective in improving appropriate parenting styles, especially for parents of children who need special attention. Another study by (Mulyana, Syifauzakia, & Wahyudi, 2024) proved that through the mentoring activities provided, mothers can feel the benefits and new knowledge, such as knowing how to manage emotions, and become their own recharge for mothers in educating children. (Astinah, Wahyuningsih, & Rachmahana, 2019) have also proven that emotion coaching training to improve teachers' skills in responding to early childhood emotions can improve teachers' skills in responding to early childhood emotions. However, some of the previous researchers have not specifically examined maintaining children's mental health through coaching for parents of early childhood. So that researchers are interested in examining how to maintain early childhood mental health through coaching for parents to be able to increase understanding and provide the right way of assistance for parents in optimising the development of early childhood mental health.

## Methods

This research uses a quasi-experiment method. This method is meant to test the impact of a treatment on the results of the research conducted (Creswell.J.W., 2013, p. 216). method was used to determine the effect of coaching for parents on early childhood mental health development. This study was conducted in Kemingking Dalam village, Taman Rajo Jambi sub-district, Muaro Jambi district, Jambi province. Participants were selected by purposive sampling. The sampling technique of this study is with the criteria of parents who are willing and have children aged 4-6 years, as well as accompanying relatives or carers of children aged 4-6 years. Activities are packaged interactively in the form of psychoeducation using the joyful learning method. Psychoeducation is a form of intervention that can be given to anyone, such as individuals, families, and groups, with the aim of identifying various kinds of challenges faced, being a source of support, and developing skills that a subject has in facing a challenge (Lukens & Mcfarlane, 2004).

The data-collecting techniques used were interviews, documentation, and observation. Data collection through interviews was conducted by interviewing parents about their parenting patterns, especially for parents with children with poor emotional development and mental health. Data collection through observation was carried out by observing the development of skills and understanding of parents during activities at socialisation, question and answer discussion sessions, and practical training activities to assist children to develop children's mental health properly. Data collection through documentation by taking documentation during activities to see the development of parents' abilities from activities as reinforcing information in the study. The analysis technique used in this study was Friedman and Mann-Whitney non-parametric statistical analysis. Friedman analysis was used to determine the effect of the training provided, and Mann-Whitney analysis to test and see the difference in parents' skills before and after being given training in responding to emotions and assisting early childhood.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the objectives of the early childhood parent mentoring coaching implementation, the findings show that parent mentoring coaching has an influence on children's mental health. Data were collected during the socialisation activities, followed by group discussions, simulations and practices. The socialisation session was led by one of the researchers who presented material on how to build proper communication with children in the family, provide an introduction to children's emotions, and assist children in times of stress. During the socialisation activity, the parents who participated focused on listening to the material presented because it was related to their daily lives, so that after participating in the activity, parents of early childhood gained an understanding of children's emotions.

The next activity is a discussion session. This activity involves parents in a group discussion to share experiences and obstacles faced by parents while accompanying their children. This discussion was guided by the researcher; the reaction of parents during this discussion activity showed that they were very interested because many asked questions related to their children's emotions. There

were even some who shared their complaints while accompanying their children. This was shown by the fact that some of the children present had poor mental health development. So that it makes researchers interested in finding out how the assistance of the parents of these children, which results in children's mental health, has not developed properly. It was found that the child's parents were parents with less harmonious household conditions, some with the assistance of parents who were busy with work so that the child was accompanied by carers or relatives who were entrusted.

The next activity session went into child mentoring coaching by providing simulations and direct practice on how to mentor and handle children's emotions. In this activity, researchers first practised how to assist children, among others: 1) Communicating words with love such as giving praise, encouragement, guidance, and giving good affectionate calls to children; 2) Provide physical touch, especially when the child is not in a good emotional state by giving a hug or caress to make the child feel calm; 3) Try to build a friendly atmosphere and joke with the child so that the child feels the parents as friends and wants to talk about the child's daily life, especially if there are prominent things that really need to be told; 4) Provide a good example, especially in controlling emotions, this does not mean that parents should not be angry, but the method of delivery must be appropriate by not yelling at the child but being firm so that the relationship will be well established between the child and the parent.

Through this hands-on activity parents can learn how to assist children when children are in a bad emotional state; parents can respond with empathy and attention to children. Because as parents, it is very important to pay attention to children's mental health from an early age by fostering good relationships between parents and children. This is done by parents always accompanying children, using the right vocabulary selection when communicating with children. This is one of the good parenting provided by parents through interactions with children, because parenting that can build good interactions between parents and children is an important element that must continue to be done to develop children's mental health (Fara, et al., 2024). The role of parents in maintaining children's mental health can also be shown through

8 actions: 1) respect, 2) listen, 3) build children's trust, 4) create a positive environment, 5) help children solve problems, 6) set realistic goals, 7) avoid sarcastic comments, and 8) provide encouragement (Salamah, Fauziah, & Wibawa, 2024). The role of parents in maintaining children's mental health can also be shown through 8 actions: 1) respect, 2) listen, 3) build children's trust, 4) create a positive environment, 5) help children solve problems, 6) set realistic goals, 7) avoid sarcastic comments, and 8) provide encouragement (Safriana, Laily, Rahayuningsih, Purdianto, & Maulana, 2024) after being given training activities, parents can be made aware of how important it is to maintain children's mental health from an early age for the growth and development of children in the future. With the assistance and training activities provided, parents are more prepared to assist early childhood with various emotional situations so as to prevent early mental health disorders in children. As the results of research (Kusnadi & Agustin, 2019) show, coaching activities provided to parents have proven effective in improving parenting styles for parents in emotional situations, especially in dealing with children who need special attention. In addition, parents also benefit and can provide them with new knowledge, such as knowing how to manage emotions and become a separate recharge for parents in educating their children (Mulyana, Syifauzakia, & Wahyudi, 2024).

It was also found that some early childhood who experienced poor mental health in Kemingking Dalam Village came from parents with poor parenting due to several factors, such as household conditions that were not harmonious, parents who lacked knowledge and understanding of assisting children in responding to their emotions, and parents who were busy working. In line with what was revealed (Fara, et al., 2024) parenting patterns that create interactions between children and parents are an important element in developing children's mental health. As well as factors that are many obstacles in parental assistance, one of which is the busyness of parents and the readiness of parents as substitute teachers (Utami & Thohir, 2022). Thus, resulting in many children's development not being optimal, especially the development of children's mental health. That way parenting patterns become important things to pay attention to and need to be changed in order to support the development of children's mental health. This is

because parents are agents of change who have a significant relationship between parenting and children's mental health (Suminar & Hamidah, 2021). It is proven that the coaching training for parents results in an increase in parents' awareness and understanding of how to provide appropriate assistance for parents in optimising children's mental health development.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that coaching activities for parents succeeded in increasing parents' awareness and understanding of the importance of early childhood mental health. With the coaching assistance provided, parents are better prepared to assist their children with various emotional situations so as to prevent children's mental health disorders early on. Based on the findings, it is hoped that this parent mentoring programme can be expanded to other communities, especially in areas with limited access to mental health information; cooperation with early childhood education institutions needs to be increased to provide mental health education in an integrated manner between schools and families, and it is important to continue to conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation in order to produce an effective and appropriate programme.

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